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ABSTRACT

Cybercounseling is an idea whose time has come, but counselors are not yet ready to say with conviction what it really is or how it should be employed. Counselors need continued interest and enthusiasm for its use, but for now, they should be experimental. The Internet will play an increasing role in how persons learn and behave. Counselors need to take greater responsibility for insuring that they hone their Internet learning skills and become sharp learners, not dull ones. The augmentation of traditional counseling with different cybercounseling features will benefit the efficacy of present day counseling and contribute to increasing the experience and research base of knowledge regarding the efficacy of cybercounseling and its different features. Insuring that all clients are skilled in information searching is the greatest gift of all. It is a skill that can be acquired irrespective of age, gender, race, or finances. Counselors should make it a critical priority in their counseling. Counselors should be known for what they bring about and not what they are called, the processes they use, or the standards they abide by. Cybercounseling and cyberlearning go together and are mutually reinforcing. They are a seamless process, one that appropriately expands the counseling field. In practice, it means a broader playing field with more opportunities for the counselor to score. Even a minimal listing of the present and potential benefits of cybercounseling suggests that it is much more than a passing fad. The existing support structures for cybercounseling suggest that the actual form it will take will very likely be with us in the future. (MKA)

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Summing Up

GARRY R. WALZ WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM JOHN W. BLOOM, JAMES SAMPSON, WAYNE LANNING, AND ROBERT CHAPMAN

It is always a challenge to know how to construct a summary and conclusion. Traditionally, a summary should not contain new material but be a concise statement of what has been said previously. A conclusion, however, should logically follow ideas presented in the document itself. New ideas or discussions not driven by the previous narrative are typically considered inappropriate.

But what of a situation where you have approximately 30 authors each with his or her own ideas—many of the ideas well developed, but others only just introduced? Clearly, a traditional writing model does not fit this publication. It both poses a horrendous task for the reviewer/writer and forces fitting ideas into a cumbersome format that imperils creative and dissonant thinking. Because this publication, in many ways, challenges the existing status quo of counseling, why not adopt a format or means of communication between the writers and readers that places a premium on expressing and examining key ideas rather than adhering to a traditional format?

That is exactly what has been done: the separate and disparate ideas of the different writers are woven together into a mosaic of knowledge generalizations that spring from the ideas and writings of the authors. It is not, however, in most cases, a direct translation of the thinking of any one writer. Therefore, what has been produced is a *summing up* that is a series of freestanding knowledge generalizations. Each of the generalizations speaks in a targeted

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and succinct manner to a cogent concept or idea that has been distilled from a wide array of the ideas presented. Wherever possible, individuals whose thinking is reflected in the statements are identified. However, in many cases, there are no clear originators, and attributions are difficult, if not impossible, to make. In these cases, the concepts are constructed as best as possible, and the responsibility for fallacious thinking or inadequate representations is this chapter's authors alone.

The term *knowledge generalization* is used as a device for conveying cogent ideas in a succinct and readily understandable manner. It provides a useful way to focus thinking and discussion on each significant concept. It is also a way of preventing other ideas and thoughts from unduly interfering with a full digestion of the inherent merit of each generalization. The blending of the generalizations into a striking tapestry of ideas can be achieved at the end by the reader. The purpose of this summing up is to serve as a springboard for new dialog and discussion, not to close them down.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION ONE

Cybercounseling is an idea whose time has come, but we as counselors are not yet ready to say with conviction what it really is or how it should be employed. We need continued interest and enthusiasm for its use, but for now, use should be experimental!

There are many gaps in our knowledge of cybercounseling, yet it is being written about with an authority and assurance that hardly seem justified by the available research. It is one thing to say that cybercounseling is a fact of the contemporary counseling scene (it is being used, and it does have its enthusiastic proponents); but it is quite another matter to say that cybercounseling has shown itself to be a viable counseling entity based upon appropriate research. There are promising initial results that are intriguing and provide good reason for further research, but cybercounseling has yet to earn the mantle of a validated and effective counseling intervention.

Notably, distance learning, which might be thought of as cybercounseling's precursor, has itself recently been the subject of numerous discussions questioning the claims made for its effectiveness. Again, distance learning does have many enthusiastic pro-

ponents, but the enthusiasm may have dimmed the critical faculties of those extolling its virtues. From a research standpoint, there is still much to be done and learned before claims can be made as to its efficacy. As to whether it is a valid learning entity with comparable outcomes to face-to-face learning, the jury is still out. It seems that at least as much caution and reservation for the claims for distance learning should be applied to cybercounseling. Though there are important differences between the two (cybercounseling and distance learning), both are essentially learning processes, and many facets of the learning are common to both. It is improbable that one would prove to be highly effective while the other would not.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION TWO

The Internet will play an increasing role in how persons learn and behave. We need to take greater responsibility for insuring that they hone their Internet learning skills and become sharp learners, not dull ones.

We must acknowledge in designing and using the basic cybertool for counseling, the Internet, that it is essentially an end user's medium where what is learned when and how is determined by the learner and not by the instructor/counselor.

The Internet is the Wild West of learning where the individual may roam at will. There is much to be gained and learned, and it beckons with a glittering array of information resources and opportunities unthinkable even a few years ago. But the end user learning culture can be harsh like the West itself. The unwary can be seduced and misled by distortion, misinformation, conflicting claims, and outright fraud. The naïve learner can pay a heavy price for the fool's gold of enticing learning opportunities, "guaranteed" outcomes, and quick fixes for whatever ails her or him.

In some quarters, the call of an earlier era for the young and adventuresome to "Go West" has been replaced by a new breed of pulp fiction writers who offer a vision of the Internet as a field of dreams and the place to go to prospect for whatever is needed. Though many starry-eyed learners are disillusioned by the enormity and uncertainty of the Internet landscape, the intermittent reinforcement by those enthralled with their discoveries keeps the

dream alive. But the fact remains that for every learning prospector who discovers his or her vein of riches, there is a growing army of dull-eyed, disillusioned prospectors who expected much and gained little.

The belief that the New West of learning and resources is a reality and offers untold benefits should not be squelched. However, the new prospector needs to learn prospecting—and to remember that in the old West it was those who sold the shovels rather than those who *used* them who prospered. To navigate the Internet successfully our clients need to be equipped with the right tools. Information filtering and scanning, informed decision making, critical thinking, and logical inference drawing are just some of the higher level skills that the end user learning culture revolution rewards. Yet these very skills are the ones that repeated national assessments have shown to be low among contemporary students. These skills also seem resistive to improvement without concerted efforts.

It, therefore, seems imperative that as counselors and educators we assume responsibility for preparing the end user for informed and skillful use of an increasingly important learning resource—the Internet. We should not pay less attention to how our clients learn about themselves and their world than we do to how they learn about careers.

The Internet is a fantastic resource for clients to learn about themselves as well as the world in which they must function. It certainly behooves us, through individual and group counseling both off-line and on-line, to sharpen the skills of our clients in using the most ubiquitous of all learning resources.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION THREE

The augmentation of traditional counseling with different cybercounseling features will benefit the efficacy of present day counseling and contribute to increasing the experience and research base of knowledge regarding the efficacy of cybercounseling and its different features.

There is a propensity in writing and thinking about cybercounseling to view it as an either/or proposition with no in-between position. (You are a cybercounselor and use it, or you are not a cybercounselor and do not use it.) Nevertheless, there appears to be an attractive middle ground where counselors use cybercounsel-

ing and/or some of its components as an augmentation of traditional counseling.

The augmentation approach seems attractive for several reasons. First, a counselor need not make an either/or commitment but can ease into it (or out of it) by experimentation with different facets of cybercounseling. Using the Internet for test giving and interpretation (Sampson), for maintaining a previously established face-to-face relationship with a client, and for conducting counselor-moderated group sessions with clients with similar types of problems are just some of the augmentations that even Internet-dubious counselors could experiment with. Use of augmentation could also result in both more intensive and extensive experimentation, which is exactly what is needed for greater validation of the methodology.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION FOUR

Insuring that all clients are skilled in information searching is the greatest gift of all. It is a skill that can be acquired irrespective of age, gender, race, geography, or finances. Counselors should make it a critical priority in their counseling.

Contemporary nonfiction and professional literature is replete with references to the magnitude and importance of the information revolution. Notably, however, there is a scarcity of discussion as to what a person needs to do to become "information smart" or as to how one should acquire and use information in this information age.

The old adage that "he who has the gold rules" could well be updated to read "searching well results in living well." The last decade has probably generated more information than any previous generation in the history of the world. Being able to access and use that information is critical to how well a person copes in contemporary society—personally and professionally. "Knowledge is power," another old adage, is truer now than ever before. Human resources development researchers are now saying that knowing how to learn and how to acquire information is a more important characteristic of job seekers than experience, because experience is retrospective, that is, it looks backward at what a person has done. Skill in accessing information is prospective, that is, learning what will be.

Whatever the truth of these generalizations, it is indubitably true that persons who cannot use the new electronic tools of the Millennium are left behind. The digital divide does operate for many rea-

sons to separate people who can cope in cyberspace from those who cannot. Clearly counselors who wish to empower their clients cannot find a more potent skill for empowerment than competence to search, retrieve, evaluate, and apply information from disparate sources—on-line and off-line. It involves using a computer effectively, but it is much more than that. It is concerned with knowing where to go to find different types of information and, more importantly, with knowing how to evaluate the information critically, separating the substantive from the superficial. It requires that a person be able to focus on how to use the information that he or she has carefully distilled from the myriad sources available, and how to convert information into knowledge and knowledge into personal action strategies. Counselors can be a big help in all of this!

Many counselors estimate that only a quarter or so of their peers regularly and skillfully use computers for themselves. Even fewer use them in working with clients at other than rudimentary data processing levels. If counselors were able to impart to counselees the means to become information smart, counselors could give to counselees the greatest gift of all that Whitney Houston sings about—self-esteem. But, actually, they would not be giving them self-esteem; they would be teaching them the means by which to attain self-esteem.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION FIVE

Basic to this generalization is the need for counseling to acquire an elan for moving out of the box, pushing the envelope, and putting our money and our future where it counts—outcomes. We should be known for what we bring about and not what we are called, the processes we use, or the standards we abide by. Controversial? Probably so! Bad? Probably not!

The major difference between perception and reality is that reality changes. The world changes, but we continue to see it as it was. A major challenge to us all is to stop using traditional thinking to deal with nontraditional events and resources.

Wayne Lanning is deeply concerned that we not try to fit such nontraditional developments as cybercounseling into a traditional mold. Cybercounseling should not be judged by traditional criteria of what counseling is. Rather it should be viewed and judged by

what it contributes to a cognitive learning process and behavioral change. If it works, fix the title, not the idea. If we need to call cybercounseling something other than counseling because it does not fit the criteria of a face-to-face relationship, then change the title. The actual title is not important, but the process, the intervention, is. Let us do what contributes to the desired outcome and the title be damned!

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION SIX

Cybercounseling and cyberlearning go together and are mutually reinforcing. They are a seamless process—one that appropriately expands the counseling field. In practice, it means a broader playing field with more opportunities for the counselor to score.

Cybercounseling and cyberlearning are highly interrelated. Many generations of Americans have enjoyed humming or singing to themselves the popular refrain of *Love and Marriage*, particularly the part about ". . . go together like a horse and carriage. You can't have one without the other." This maxim definitely applies to cybercounseling and cyberlearning. John Bloom, in the early phases of designing and titling this book, suggested that both cybercounseling and distance learning must be included. During labors over the contents, his suggestion proved to be highly prophetic. One could not be had without the other!

Particularly in moving toward giving more attention to counselor education and to broadening the perspective of cybercounseling, it became clear how important it was to cover both. The *cyber* in cybercounseling reflects the fact that we live in a life space without walls; and breaking out of the walls of the counselor's office to reach clients and students wherever they might be is our goal. Depending upon your learning style, you are either reading this summing up in a traditional manner, at the end, or non-traditionally, as the first chapter you read. In either case, but especially for those who have read the full text, it is abundantly clear that the articles and discussions have, in their focus, moved out of the counselor's office and into cyberspace. Clearly this is what was needed—and wanted. Also wanted was to coin a new word—*cyberlearning*—so as to make the point that this publication is not talking about just any kind of learning, but a learning that is relevant to learning and behaving in a cyberage.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION SEVEN

Even a minimal listing of the present and potential benefits of cybercounseling suggests that it is much more than a passing fad.

Even a cursory accounting of present and potential future benefits indicates that cybercounseling and cyberlearning have roots that will help them weather future challenges. Among the foreseeable benefits are

- the unification of people from around the world (both caregivers and care recipients) who, as a result of their cyberinteractions develop a greater appreciation of similarities and differences;
- a demystification of the counseling process so that more people can see the benefits and seek counseling assistance;
- judicious use of technology at a time when the relevance and worth of a helping service is judged by the extent to which and how well it uses technology; and
- increasing interaction with and learning from related professions as regards the effective use of both technology and the characteristics of "impactful" helping interventions. Clearly counselors are both sharing their insights and learning from the insights of therapists and other helpers.

KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION EIGHT

The existing support structures for cybercounseling suggest that the actual form it will take is uncertain, but indubitably, it is a delivery system for counseling that will very likely be with us in the future.

Overall, there is good reason to believe that cybercounseling will continue to expand in use with increasing support from research, professional caregiver participation, public support, and its increasing relevance in a technological era. But perhaps most of all, optimism regarding its future development and position within the helping professions relates to cybercounseling's capacity to reach more people in need with viable sources of assistance at comparably lower cost than any other discernible helping service presently available or even remotely on the horizon.

An eloquent perspective on the development of cybercounseling is provided by John Bloom:

This volume is a testament to the ability of the behavioral health professionals to rise up and be proactive in the face of evolving technologies. Rather than be victimized by nay-saying professionals or sensationalizing media representatives, the behavioral health (and the medical) professions have very rapidly and very wisely developed standards and codes to guide the evolution of this phenomenon. In less than 5 years licensure boards, membership organizations, and certification bodies have responded to the unknown and provided novice and professional alike the information necessary to proceed down the cyber road with appropriate caution.

OVERARCHING KNOWLEDGE GENERALIZATION

We should be fully committed to, but only half sure of, cybercounseling.

Without commitment to it, we will not undertake the rigorous further development it needs. Being half sure will help us to reserve judgment until we have more information on which to make our judgment.

As visionaries, we should be optimistic and excited; and as behavioral scientists, we need to undertake continuing exploration and examination.